

## **Ephesians 6**

Have you ever seen or heard this man? He is radio host Alex Jones, well known as America's leading conspiracy theorist." Mr. Jones has accused the US government of planning the Oklahoma City bombing, the September 11 attacks, and falsifying details regarding the 1969 Moon landing! And that's just the beginning of it! He has claimed "that the president has access to weather weapons capable of not only creating tornadoes but also moving them around, on demand" and that Hurricane Irma may have been geo-engineered. Wait! He also stated "no one died" in Sandy Hook and Stoneman Douglas school shootings, and they were fake news created by gun control advocates.

Or maybe you've heard of QAnon, the followers of an anonymous poster named Q who alleges that Satan-worshipping pedophiles are running a global child sex-trafficking ring and plotting against President Trump, who is fighting them. QAnon supporters have accused many liberal Hollywood actors, Democratic politicians, and high-ranking government officials of being members of the cabal. They have also claimed that Pres. Trump is working to expose the sex trafficking ring and prevent a coup d'État by Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and George Soros. Of course, no part of these conspiracy claims is proved true or based in fact. How in the world does this stuff exist in modern America?

I liked this answer: Conspiracism serves the needs of diverse political and social groups in America and elsewhere. It identifies elites, blames them for economic and social catastrophes, and assumes that things will be better once popular action can remove them from positions of power. In other words, it's always tempting to point at someone else, someone of a different social class, someone from another political party, someone who's different, and blame them for all the problems. And to think that if we just eliminated that problem, our world would be better.

On first hearing the apostle Paul might appear to be pointing to a conspiracy of other-worldly proportions when he writes: Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the

spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. But to understand his words, we need the short course on where Satan came from. He and all the angels were spiritual beings, not bodily like us, created by God in the beginning to serve God and us. But there was a rebellion in heaven. The angels...did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling (**Jude 6**). Satan and the rebellious angels did not want to be servants, but gods. And Jesus said, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven (**Lk 17:18**). So the heavenly realms are where Satan started out, but he has been cast out. He is an angel and angry, so don't underestimate him. But he is only an angel and not God.

So you can't say, The devil made me do it! He can't force you to do anything. But he is a great observer of human nature. The Bible tells us that Satan exploits our weaknesses, whether I'm hungry, horny, selfish, or proud. He incites, assues, contradicts, lies, and tempts us. He knows that until we reach heaven, you and I have two natures. In Ep 4 we read: Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires. Satan only plays to my old self, my old nature, and the Lord says, Get rid of that old old nature like an old set of clothes! To be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (**Ep 4:22ff**). Dress like the adult that you actually are, in Christ's righteousness and holiness. Have you ever found that 20 year old shirt or pair of pants in the attic or in the back of your closet and tried them on again? Did they fit? Did they look stupid and out-dated with the lapels this wide, or the pants with pleats? Satan wants me to think that I'm still that skinny or that hip!

So who's the real enemy? Satan is just the cheerleader and encourager, but the enemy is right here. Classic example is the Jewish religious ruling council debating what to do with Jesus. They concluded: If we let [Jesus] go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation (**Jn 11:48**). They saw their enemies as Jesus and the Romans and not their own horribly, screwed-up reasoning to murder a completely innocent man! What an example of how Paul described the end result of nurturing the old nature at the encouragement of Satan:

They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts..having lost all sensitivity **(Ep 4:18)**. It's an ugly picture, as true for me as for the Sanhedrin. So the apostle James warns: Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death **(Jas 1:14-15)**. Or as the cartoon Pogo once said, We have met the enemy and he is us. This battle is so close to home that I don't want to admit it! But it's too close for comfort, so I hope we can all listen carefully when the apostle writes: Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. How can I fight it, when the enemy is right here?

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist. That belt is the most necessary because it holds everything else up, your pants and your sword! That belt is truth, God's truth about ourselves and about God. Denying the truth about myself is what keeps me from forgiving others. I think I'm better than they, that I'm forgivable and they are not. Thinking you are better than others is what puts up the dividing wall of hostility between real Americans and immigrants, between husbands and wives, children and parents, employers and employees. We heard Paul write about all those divisions in Ephesus, and he said, Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ **(Ep 5:21)**. And we can do that because we know the truth about ourselves and Christ's great love: As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins! Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions"it is by grace you have been saved **(Ep 2:1ff)**. So buckle on the belt of God's truth!

Then a piece of defensive hardware, the breastplate of righteousness. For a soldier, this was armor that covered neck to thigh, front and back. For you and me, this protection is the righteousness of Christ in which we were dressed at our baptism. Our own righteousness will hardly protect us--it's too easily punctured, and the Bible says that Satan is the great accuser, who accuses us day and

night. And I listen to those accusations! Why can I still remember the shoplifting I did in 7th grade? The mess I made with my angry words 15 years ago? Why is it so hard to forget my past sins, mistakes and failures? Satan would love to defeat you and me with the thought that we're just not good enough for God and heaven. We'd be waving the white flag of surrender, rather than routing him with God's perfect forgiveness and the perfect righteousness of our Savior.

History tells us that the great armies of Alexander and Caesar won by mobility. Our mobility comes from feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. Having peace with God, having peace of mind because we're not dragging around a burden of guilt, shame and fear, having the sure gift of heaven, allows you and me to live freely, to act freely for our Savior, even to take risks for him. Rather than being paralyzed by worry or fear, we live and move confidently!.

Battle is full of sharp, dangerous objects, so we take up the shield of faith, with which [we] can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Satan fires at us with all kinds of sharp arrows and he knows our weak spots. But the strength of faith is not how strong or weakly I believe, it's whom I believe. Trying to stand in our own goodness, Satan is going to skewer us through, but Jesus' goodness is perfect and impenetrable.

Even with all the other equipment, a soldier would never go without a helmet. A simple blow to the head, from the enemy or just an accident, could mean his very life. Our final protection is the helmet of salvation. Our salvation in heaven is God's gift which we possess right now and no one can take away. Our real and lasting life is there safe with God. Let's see if you can complete this most-important fill-in-the-blank: For a believer, worse case scenario is that we die and go to heaven! We are perfectly and ultimately safe.

And finally we have an offensive weapon, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. The Roman sword was a short sword, not for slashing but for stabbing in close combat. It was deadly to the enemy, as the Word of God is to Satan and to my messed-up old nature. Remember how Jesus defeated Satan's temptations? Satan's

temptations were perfectly crafted for Jesus: If you really are the Son of God...why are you hungry, why are you suffering, why not grab instant gratification? Again and again he said, It is written! I need, you need to do the same thing!

Which brings us to the take-away today. The army the apostle Paul knew was the Roman army. It had great numbers, was well-equipped, and was so successful that the Roman Empire stretched from India in the east to Spain in the west, north to Great Britain and south into Africa. But its real strength was not in numbers or weapons; it was in training. The historian Josephus wrote about the Roman troops: As though they had been born with weapons in hand, they never have a truce from training.

Yes, it's a battle. Satan is threatening, and he has his greatest ally right here in my old nature. But don't despair. God has supplied us with all we need to win the battle. Don't underestimate his power and his unbeatable armor. You have great opportunities to try on that armor even in our strange Covid-contained times. Go to [votl.life](http://votl.life): Sermon Deep Dives, Advent/Christmas Bible devotions, Bible studies and Faith resources, parenting support, all on line and all the time! Don't forget Victory Kids for your children and just the Bible on your shelf. It's all his gift to you. Just use it. Amen.